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Archaeological Testing of Site 41CI30 Childress County, Texas

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Archaeological Testing of Site 41CI30 Childress County, Texas

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING OF SITE 41CI30,
CHILDRESS COUNTY, TEXAS

by
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State Department of Highways and Public Transportation
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June, 1988

ABSTRACT

The State Department of Highways and Public Transportation (SDHPT) conducted archaeological tests on Site 41CI30 in Childress County in May 1988. The site is located about 1.5 miles south of Childress at the intersection of Scatterbranch Creek and a county road and covers about one acre in the northeast quadrant of the intersection. The majority of it is located on private property outside the jurisdiction of the SDHPT. Testing indicated that the site is a low density prehistoric campsite. Lithic debris was largely limited to the upper 20-30 cm of orange, sandy soils. A total of four 1 meter squares were excavated within the right-of-way to a depth of 50 cm. These units exposed part of a hearth visible in the roadcut. A total of 47 flakes were recovered from 20 levels. No tools were found in the excavations and the only biological material recovered was an unburned hackberry seed from the hearth. Further research is not proposed because of the low artifact recovery rates and the eroded nature of much of the site. The portion of 41CI30 within the project right-of-way does not appear worthy of nomination as a State Archaeological Landmark. The area outside the project limits is less disturbed and located on more desirable landforms and may merit inclusion as a State Archaeological Landmark.

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INTRODUCTION

The State Department of Highways and Public Transportation (SDHPT) became involved with Site 41CI30 through plans by the Department to widen and extend a county road south of Childress, Texas. When completed the roadway will bear the designation of FM 3489. Project limits were set from FM 2024, 1.0 mile south of FM 164, east to FM 3031. A routine archaeological survey was performed on the proposed project on April 11, 1988 and Site 41CI30 was located. Evidence of the site consisted of a hearth eroding from the roadcut on the north side of the county road east of Scatterbranch Creek. An archaeological site survey form was completed and submitted to the Balcones Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin and plans were made to test the site to determine the significance and the amount of subsurface materials present on 41CI30.

Testing was conducted between May 23 and May 26, 1988 by the writer with field assistance from three employees of the District 25 Childress Residency office. The partially exposed hearth in the roadcut was further exposed and mapped and the equivalent of four 1 meter squares were excavated into the site.

Results of this fieldwork indicated that the site contained relatively shallow cultural deposits in the upper 20 cm of orange sandy soil. It was also noted that the site appeared to have a low density occupation recognized by the sparsity of lithic debitage and that both erosional and bioturbation processes were actively altering the cultural context. Testing was halted once it became obvious that the site contained little subsurface material and that

even large scale excavations would not produce a sufficient quantity of data in valid contexts for a meaningful analysis.

The following report provides a synopsis of the site description, archaeological background, testing techniques, artifact descriptions, and an analysis and conclusion.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Childress County and the adjoining counties are located in the southeastern corner of the Texas panhandle and along the eastern edge of the Llano Estacado. Because of a number of factors, the area has been offered few federal projects and has missed a major funding source for archaeological research. The entire panhandle area has witnessed little archaeological investigations when compared to other areas such as Central Texas.

The general cultural-historical framework for the area can be divided into the Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Woodland, and Formative Periods. The Paleo-Indian Period is the earliest prehistoric manifestation and is distinguishable by a series of fluted and/or lanceolate dart point types usually with basal grinding. These may be found with extinct megafauna. The Archaic Period follows the Paleo-Indian and is recognized by a group of stemmed dart point types often made of quartzitic materials. This period represents a hunting and gathering subsistence pattern based on a nomadic lifestyle. The Woodland Period represents the transition from the Archaic Period into a Plains Village lifestyle and is recognized by the co-occurrence of dart points and arrowpoints along with thick cordmarked pottery. subsistence patterns became more sedentary and the first acceptance of horticulture may be represented. The Formative Period was one of Plains Village development marked by the appearance of permanent settlements and horticulture being an important element of the subsistence base. Arrowpoints made of Alibates and other flints are more common than dart points. Small villages were present and were occupied for a number of years. Toward the end of this period, the horse

became domesticated on the Plains and lifestyles reverted back to the Archaic subsistence strategy based on bison hunting and general gathering.

While this sequence of periods may be accepted for the Panhandle region, Childress, Hardeman, Cottle, Collingsworth, Donley, Hall and Motley counties are areas that lack the research which would support this particular sequence. Virtually all archaeological research in this area has been survey oriented with little testing and few excavations. As a result, little is known of internal chronologies for the region.

Previous research in Childress County includes surveys by Cole (1979), Dickson and Yates (1983), and Jack Hughes (1973a;1973b). The major work in Hardeman County was a transmission line survey (Kluge, Turpin, and Thurmond 1979). Hughes (1972) and Etchieson, et al. (1979) reported on surveys in Cottle County. David Hughes (1977) reported on bison kills in Collingsworth County. Other reports dealing with the county include the work of Studer (1931) and Moorehead (1931).

Research in Donley County includes a survey of Greenbelt Reservoir (Hughes n.d.), a report on a bison kill (Tunnell and Hughes 1955) and notes on a double Indian burial (Witte 1947; 1955). Published research in Hall County includes a survey in Memphis Texas (David Hughes and Hughes-Jones 1983), a survey of MacKenzie Reservoir (Malone 1970) and reports of burials excavated at the Jim Arnold Site (McKern 1964; Tunnell 1964). Research in Motley County includes a survey by Campbell (1975, 1977a 1977b) and notes by Jackson (1938) on picture writing.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Archaeological Site 41CI30 is located along the east bank of Scatterbranch Creek and north of an unnumbered county road. This county road ends at US 83 approximately 1.25 miles south of the intersection of US 83 and US 287 in Childress (Fig. 1). The site is located about 2000 feet west of US 83.

The site appears to cover one acre along the east side of the creek on heavily eroded slopes and into the western edge of large plowed field. The site's orientation is along the creek bank with the southern margins removed by the county road and the northern limits along a pronounced gulley 100 meters north of the road. A thorough surface examination along the deep roadcuts at the site locale failed to reveal any indications that the site extends across the county road.

The creek is one of several branches of the aptly named Scatterbranch Creek and may have been a reliable watercourse in prehistoric contexts. The creek is well entrenched with a 10-15 meter deep channel cut through orange sands and reddish clays. The actual channel is now 15 meters wide with a flat bottom . Several dams upstream from the site location have halted the normal flow of the creek. During the time of our testing a small trickle of water was observed emerging from a large wetland north of the right-of-way. The presence of any water in the channel during a dry year may indicate that the creek was once substantial.

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As previously mentioned, the county road has removed the southern limits of the site. The creek banks have been deeply cut to ease the grade from the creek bottom to the top of hill and some of **41C130** was inadvertently removed years ago. The roadcut does provide a good cross-section of the site and indicates that the soils in the immediate area consist of 30 to 80 cm of orange sand overlying a hard basal reddish clay.

Vegetation on the site consists of native grasses and yucca. There are no trees at the site location or along the creek. Grass cover was fairly thick in the right-of-way of the county road but overgrazed outside the project limits.

Erosion has had a major impact on the site area. The roadcut shows some indications of sloughing of deposits and it contains several gullies. The area immediately north of the right-of-way appears to have been subjected to frequent sheet erosion while the area south of the project is heavily gullied. The western side of the creek is also badly eroded and a borrow pit exists along the northern right-of-way limits.

TESTING PROCEDURES

Testing procedures began with a thorough surface examination of the site to determine its extent within the right-of-way, the amount of erosion present, and to locate any concentrations of lithic debris on the surface or along the roadcut. Both sides of the roadcut were carefully examined. While the south side yielded no lithic debris, the northern roadcut contained the remains of a limestone hearth and 5 quartzite flakes scattered over 50 meters. An examination of the existing and proposed right-of-way revealed a 5 meter wide strip of relatively undisturbed land which would be involved on the north side of the county road.

The surface survey suggested that the site was about 50 meters wide. The eastern end may lie in the western edge of a freshly plowed field where 3 flakes and a burned rock were seen. The western end appears to correlate with the edge of a steep slope dipping towards Scatterbranch Creek. The southern edge of the site appears to have been removed by the roadcut and the north end is thought to occur at a deep gulley about 100 meters north of the right-of-way.

Erosion on the site was evidenced by a deep gulley located just west of the exposed hearth, a smaller gulley nearer the creek within the right-of-way, and by a large area of sheet erosion north of the project limits. Gopher activity was noted in the orange sand by both gopher mounds and extremely soft soil which collapsed underfoot when a run was stepped on.

Since there were no other visible surface concentrations of cultural debris present within the right-of-way, plans were formulated to expose the remainder of the hearth and excavate units midway between the feature and the edge of the site within the county right-of-way. Figure 2 , a contour map of 41CI30, indicates the placement of these units.

Excavation units consisted of one 1x2 meter unit (Test Unit 1) and two 1 meter squares. All were excavated in 10 cm deep vertical levels measured from the existing ground surface. All excavated soil was screened through 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth and all cultural material was bagged by square and level before being brought to the SDHPT Archaeology Lab for processing. Excavations were halted once sterile basal clay was reached in each unit.

Test excavations were performed with shovels and trowels. Shovels were normally used to remove soil from excavation levels and trowels were used for more delicate work such as cleaning walls and floors and the excavation of Feature 1.

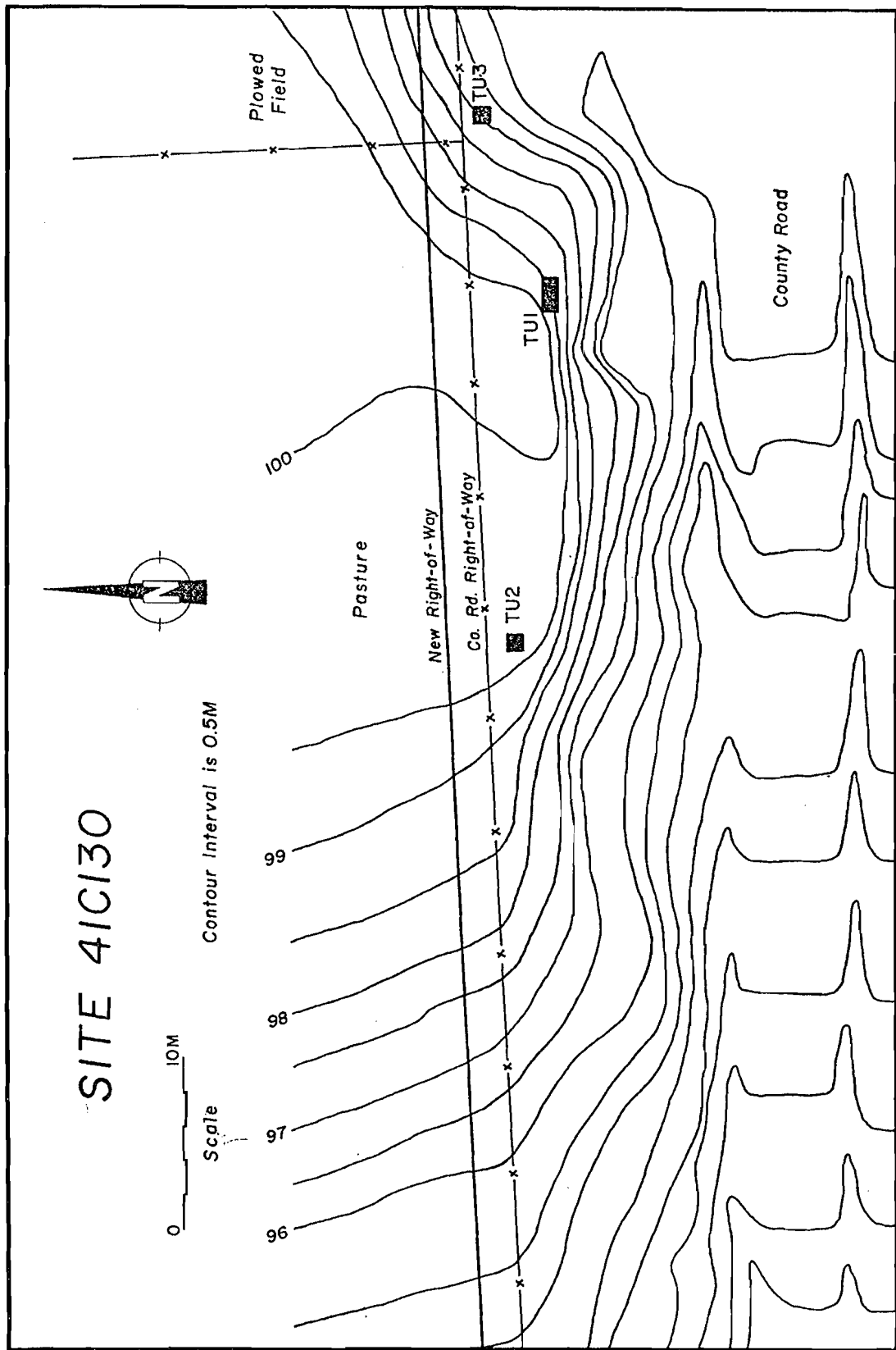


FIGURE 2. Contour map of Site 41CI30 showing excavation units.

ARTIFACTS RECOVERED

Feature 1

Feature 1 was the remains of the hearth observed eroding from the roadcut. Because of the unevenness of the edge, Test Unit 1, a 1x2 meter unit, could not be placed at the edge of the roadcut and still produce consistent volumes of soil from each level removed to reach Feature 1. The Test Unit was located slightly away from the edge as shown in Figure 3 and excavated in 10 cm deep levels until 5 burned rocks were exposed in level 3. At this point excavations in the unit were halted and the balk area between Test Unit 1 and the edge of the roadcut was removed. Most of the burned rocks were located in the balk area and are mapped in Figure 3.

Feature 1 was located at a depth of 30 cm below the present ground surface and was situated at the contact of the orange sandy zone and the orange sandy clay. The feature was a single layer of burned limestone and quartzite rocks averaging about 8 cm in diameter. Several specimens indicate a color shift normally associated with heating and several others contain angular breaks which frequently occur in heating. The feature is interpreted as a limestone hearth with a flat bottom. There were no indications of a basin or pit.

Exact dimensions obviously cannot be determined since part of the feature has eroded away. The shape appears to have been oval and the entire hearth may have approached a meter in diameter. Half of a hackberry seed was found among the stones. No tools, bone, or lithic debitage was found in direct relation with the feature.

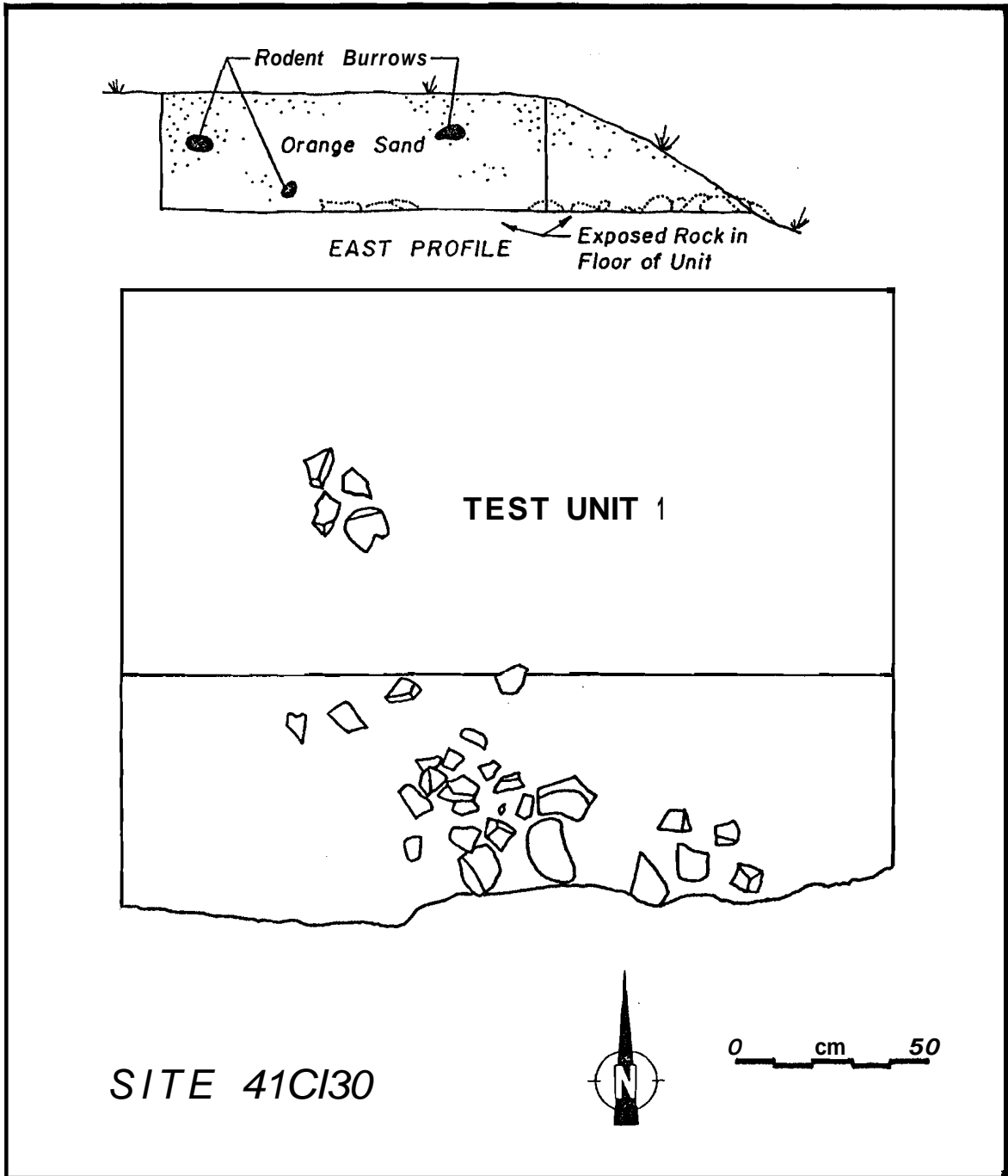


FIGURE 3. Plan and profile view of Feature 1 in Test Unit 1.

Artifacts

Artifacts recovered from the subsurface testing of **41CI30** consist of a fragment of an insulator similar to those used on electric fences, **36** quartzite flakes, **10** flint flakes, and **1** flake of Alibates flint. The insulator fragment was found in level **1** of Test Unit **1** near a fence post which seems to be in a good context for a electric fence insulator. Provenience data on the lithic debitage is presented in Table **1**.

Table **1**: Flake debitage recovered from **41CI30**

Level	Test Unit 1	Test Unit 2	Test Unit 3
1	5	4	3
2	11	5	3
3	8	1	3
4	3	0	0
5	1	0	0
	28	10	9

A glance at Table **1** indicates that virtually all of the lithic debitage is limited to the upper **30** cm of the site in the orange sand. Only **4** flakes were found deeper than **30** cm and these may have filtered downward through the sandy soil or have been displaced by gopher activity.

Quartzite is the most common lithic material used on the site. Thirty-six of the **47** flakes are quartzitic materials, **10** are flint, and a single specimen is Alibates flint. Thirty-one flakes are interior flakes and **16** are

decortication flakes. It is interesting to note that all of the non-quartzite debitage are interior flakes or flake fragments. Only 14 complete flakes were recovered.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A thorough surface reconnaissance and test excavations at Site 41CI30 suggest that the site is a shallow low density prehistoric campsite of undetermined age. Lithic debitage, normally the most common artifacts recovered from prehistoric sites, was noted to be very sparse on the surface, in the roadcut, and in the test unit levels. A maximum depth of 30 cm is proposed for the site. Forty-three of the 47 excavated flakes were found above 30 cm. Feature 1, the eroded limestone hearth, was also located in level 3.

The age of the occupation cannot be accurately determined because of the total lack of tools and especially the diagnostic artifacts. An Archaic habitation may be represented because of the dominance of quartzite flakes instead of flint. Several collections from the area were examined and a definite preference for flint and/or Alibates was noted for the production of arrow points. Dart points in the observed collections tended to be made of quartzites or petrified wood. At any rate, the age remains unknown.

The recovery rates on lithic debitage suggest a low density occupation. It is believed that the test units excavated into the site constitute a valid sample of what can be expected for artifact densities within the right-of-way. If so, a total excavation of the right-of-way is unlikely to produce a sufficient quantity of materials for a valid analysis. The context of the deposits is also somewhat questioned due to the obvious bioturbation in progress at the site. Gopher runs were visible in all units excavated to a depth of 40 cm and some movement of materials is suspected.

Additional research is not proposed for Site 41CI30 due to the scarcity of materials on the site. It is believed that additional testing or excavation of the site would provide little if any valid information on the prehistory of the area. Those portions of 41CI30 within the proposed right-of-way are not thought to be significant enough for inclusion as a State Archaeological Landmark. The portion of the site outside the project limits were not tested and their significance cannot be accurately evaluated. A surface examination of these areas suggests that considerable sheet erosion has occurred and the context may be questioned.

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